

Learning the Dog Show Ropes

Judges' advice on dog shows, from start to finishing.

Sue Jeffries

Find a mentor and start watching people at the shows, she continues. When I first started showing dogs in 1952, I had German Shepherd Dogs and then Beagles. I watched others in the ring and decided I needed to take longer strides. Then I watched people grooming and conditioning their dogs. I absorbed everything. And I read. The book that helped me most was *The Dog in Action*, by McDowell Lyon. It opened my young mind, and it was written so anyone could understand it.

But most importantly, I watched people all the time and soaked up everything. I had mentors who never even knew they were mentoring me.

Marjorie Martorella, of Englishtown, N.J., made an indelible mark on Pointers with her famed Marjetta bloodlines, and now she judges all Sporting, Hound, and Working breeds, as well as Best in Show. She also has sound advice for newcomers.

Buy your dog from a reputable breeder one who will take you under his wing and offer guidance and support, she says. I would also suggest that, even if the first dog you buy isn't a star, don't rush off to buy another immediately. Take your time, make your mistakes with the first one (we all have!), and truly learn the breed so you can eventually make an informed decision on another dog. Too many newcomers tend to get so wrapped up in the sport that they fast become collectors.

Martorella also offers tips on ring procedure. Before you enter the ring, observe the judges pattern, she says. Rarely does a judge vary his procedure. If its a single class entry, note if he takes the dog around or has the dog go right onto the table or stack for examination. Watch the gaiting pattern. Is he taking the dogs down and back or in a triangle?

Many judges will ask the class to go around first. When you gait your dog, don't run up on the dog in front of you. When stacking, leave plenty of room between your dog and the one in front of you. If your dog is a table breed, while the dog in front of you starts gaiting, put your dog on the table and have it ready to be examined. Stack the dog with its front pads close to the front of the table. This makes examination easier, especially for us judges with short arms!

If you don't have a table dog, stack your dog so the judge can examine your dog as soon as he finishes assessing the movement of the dog in front of you. Whatever you do, do not start giving your dog bait as the judge is trying to look in his mouth. That is very irritating to most of us! When the last dog in the class is gaited, start stacking your dog so when the judge turns around for that last look, your dog is looking his best.

After the judging is over, try to assess what happened, Martorella continues. Is there anything you could have done differently? Was your dog competitive in the class he was entered in? Was his grooming up to par with the other exhibits? Do you need to spend more time training the dog?